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SUBJECT: MFA MOVES CLOSER TO U.S. ON KOSOVO; POLITICAL PARTIES MOVE FURTHER AWAY

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Classified By: DCM Lawrence R. Silverman for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶11. (C) Summary: The Slovaks have come around within EU circles to acceptance of "welcoming the Ahtisaari proposal" and are working toward consensus on GAERC conclusions on Kosovo and Serbia, according to PolDir Miroslav Lajcak. On the other hand, Slovak political leaders are digging in their heels to oppose Kosovo independence and/or any change in Serbia's borders. While we expected such a reaction from the nationalists, we were surprised that even former PM Dzurinda jumped into the fray to criticize GOS policy and FM Kubis. In 2/6 meetings with PM Kostunica, Dzurinda was told that Serbia could accept everything except UN membership for Kosovo and a change in Serbia's borders. The issue of Kosovo will likely come to the parliamentary floor in the coming weeks, as several parties have vowed to introduce parliamentary resolutions. While politicians have their field day, the MFA continues to look for ways to move ahead. Lajcak specifically requested that the U.S. weigh in with S/E Ahtisaari and the U.K. to respond favorably to a delay of about ten days so Ahtisaari can meet with both the Kosovars and the Serbian parliamentary committee, but the Slovaks know this ball is in the Serbs' court at the moment. End Summary.

GAERC Conclusions

¶12. (C) MFA PolDir Miroslav Lajcak told DCM 2/8 that Slovakia had backed down from its earlier stance within the EU and would support language in the GAERC conclusion on Kosovo that "welcomed Ahtisaari's proposal." The major remaining hurdle was whether to include language that conditioned EU involvement on a UNSCR. He said the Ambassadors of Hungary and Spain had called on him early the morning of 2/8 to lobby for this language. Hungary was asking for the support of all V-4 countries on the issue, and Spain also said the language was desirable. Lajcak said that the UK was firmly opposed to mention of a UNSCR because it could be misused by the Russians in the future. His personal reaction was, "Why not include it, since everyone knows there will be a UNSCR." On the other hand, Slovakia could live without it.

¶13. (C) Austria insisted strongly on waiting to approve Kosovo conclusions until the members see the draft conclusions on Serbia that come out of the 2/7 EU Troika visit to Belgrade, and Slovakia gladly joined that position. The issues of Kosovo and Serbia are undeniably linked. The Serbia conclusion, in Slovakia's view, should state EU expectations for the formation of a democratic, pro-European government fully committed to ICTY compliance. If such a government emerges, the EU can reopen the Stability and Association Agreement (SAA). He would like to re-link ICTY cooperation

to European integration, including an offer of candidate state status. But that can come only after there is a new, good government in Belgrade. The Serbs must make the first move.

How to Move Forward with Serbia

¶4. (C) Lajcak reiterated his previous statement that commitment to Ahtisaari's timeline must be "firm, but not rigid" and asked that the U.S. support a delay of ten days. He said Belgrade is showing positive signs of engaging in the process through the formation of a parliamentary committee, which will solve the issue of "constitutional legitimacy." This also effectively cuts the maximum period of delay from 120 days (waiting for a new government) to 30 days (waiting for a new parliament). Lajcak said Ahtisaari's plan to begin talks with Kosovo on February 13, and then let the Serbs join later when they were ready, was ill-considered. It was unnecessary to start without the Serbs and doing so would be interpreted by Serbia as Ahtisaari conspiring with the Kosovars to prepare a dark plot. Lajcak said he had spoken to the UK coordinator on the Balkans to request this small delay, but did not get a definitive answer. DCM later told Lajcak that the ball was in the Serbs' court; Ahtisaari was waiting for a Serbian request for a delay until formation of the committee. Lajcak had expected the Serbs to make the request during the 2/7 Troika visit and would see what the GOS could do to help move the Serbs along.

On the Home Front: Political Parties Gang up on MFA

¶5. (C) As predicted reftel, headlines 2/7 that claimed all political parties had expressed support or acquiescence for eventual Kosovo independence caused a huge backlash on 2/8. Slovak National Party (SNS) leader Jan Slota gave a press conference where he stated his intention to initiate a parliamentary resolution on the integrity of the borders of Serbia. "It is unthinkable that a minority should have the right to its own state. Two Albanias cannot exist; there is no such thing as a Kosovar nation," he said.

¶6. (C) The big surprise and disappointment to us and to the MFA was that SDKU leader and former Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda held a press conference 2/8 and insisted that granting Kosovo independence against the will of Serbia would be a big mistake. A Dzurinda advisor and Lajcak told us Dzurinda had visited with Kostunica 2/6 and returned committed to making a public stand. Dzurinda harshly criticized Kubis for acting against Slovak national interests by proclaiming that Kosovo independence was "inevitable" and for weakening Serbia's negotiating position. Dzurinda also called for support of the 10-day delay requested by Serbia. Furthermore, he expressed his intention to introduce a binding parliamentary resolution on how the GOS should vote on the Kosovo issue in the UNSC. He warned of consequences elsewhere of Kosovar independence, stressing that Kosovar sovereignty "cannot be forced upon" Serbia. Dzurinda said he considered Ahtisaari's plan a basis for further talks, which really had just started. The former PM said Slovakia should be ready to join a minority in the EU on Kosovo if necessary. (Comment: Obviously, Dzurinda is seeking domestic political gains through his stance. End comment.)

¶7. (C) Lajcak had obviously received a readout of the Dzurinda-Kostunica meeting. He told the DCM that Kostunica had said Serbia could live with everything except UN membership for Kosovo and a change in Serbia's borders. Lajcak further said the Serbs would never admit to this as their bottom line, but it was important to know.

¶8. (C) Missing in the domestic debate so far is any comment from the Prime Minister's office, or from Fico himself. He is scheduled to return from China 2/9. (Comment: Although Fico told the Ambassador 1/29 that Slovakia would not be the lone EU country that grinds the process to a halt, it is hard to imagine that he will not opine on Kosovo upon his return

from China, and he is widely known to be pro-Serb. End comment.)

Next Steps

¶9. (C) Lajcak believes that the MFA has made progress with politicians, and that more can be made over time. He said, in fact, that Kubis welcomes the idea of a debate in Parliament. It will provide a forum for all viewpoints to be brought out into the open, to present rational arguments, and to explain the international realities requiring a solution now.

¶10. (C) The DCM informed Lajcak that Ambassador Wisner's visit to Moscow would begin 2/8 and expressed our hope that the Russians could be persuaded to abstain on a UNSCR, if they decided that Kosovo was not worth isolation from both the U.S. and the EU. Lajcak said the Russians could help by encouraging the Serbs to engage. U.S.-EU unity was essential to trying to get a Russian abstention on a UN vote. We have to "treat the Russians nicely," and reassure them that their views are heard and taken into consideration. Lajcak said he was more optimistic about the Russian stance than in the past, despite recent rhetoric.

¶12. (C) Finally, Lajcak said he would warmly welcome a visit by DAS Rosemary DiCarlo at the earliest opportunity.

VALLEE